

ZVIA MARKOVITS & SADIK KARTAL**THE TEACHING PROFESSION AS SEEN BY PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS:
A COMPARISON STUDY OF ISRAEL AND TURKEY****Abstract**

608 pre-service teachers from Israel and from Turkey, in their first year and in their fourth (and last) year of study, were asked to complete a questionnaire in order to explore the reasons that led them to choose teaching as their career and to reveal their beliefs regarding several aspects of the status of the teaching profession. Results show some similarities as well as some differences between pre-service teachers in Israel and Turkey as well as between first year and fourth year pre-service teachers in both countries.

Introduction

Teaching is complex and good teachers are needed to cope with the huge challenges this profession requires. In spite of the need for high quality teachers in the educational system, the salary teachers are paid in not high and in many countries the status of the teaching profession is low. How these issues affect students' willingness to choose teaching as their career? What are the characteristics pre-service teachers use to define good teachers? In this study we aim to reveal beliefs hold by pre-service teachers from Israel and Turkey regarding the status of the teaching profession in their country and the characteristics they use to define a 'good teacher'. Moreover we aim to explore their reasons for choosing to become teachers and to look into the changes they think should be done in the educational system in their country.

There is a large body of research focusing on the reasons for choosing a teaching career. Students choose teaching as their career for different reasons. The literature (for example, Moran et al., 2001; Low et al., 2011) suggests altruistic reasons (seeing teaching as a mission or a desire to work with children), extrinsic reasons (relating to remuneration and job security) and intrinsic factors (personal growth and other opportunities that the teaching job might offer). Korb (2010) investigated reasons for choosing teaching among 406 students in order to evaluate the widespread belief that students choose teaching as a last resort career. He found that the two top reasons for choosing the teaching profession were to shape the future of children and to make social contribution. Only 18% of the participants explicitly reported that they choose teaching as a last resort.

The status of the teaching profession receives attention all over the world. A research which investigated the status of teachers and the teaching profession in England (Hargreaves, et al., 2006), surveyed the public opinion, the media, teachers and other associated groups on different aspects of the status issue. One of the results was that secondary teachers were ranked in the 12th place and elementary teachers in the 14th place out of 16 occupations, suggesting that the status of the teaching profession is low, and that there are large differences between the teaching profession and other professions judged to have high status. One of the factors that contribute to status of a profession is the salary. Ingersoll & Perda (2008) presented

tables with mean salaries of selected occupations in the United States. Teachers are at the bottom of the tables. The salaries of teachers are low in both countries Israel and Turkey. According to the OECD (2012) the salary of an elementary school teacher with 15 teaching years is about 29,000 \$ in Israel and about 27,500 \$ in Turkey, much lower than in countries such as Australia, England, Portugal, Japan and the United States.

Students choose to become teachers even though the salary is low. Many of them choose this career because they believe they can be good teachers and make a change. Murphy et al. (2004) investigated the characteristics of 'good teachers' as seen by teachers and by students. They found that good teachers are believed to be caring, patient, not boring and polite. They also find that beliefs about good teaching seem to be formed at an early age.

Research design

297 pre-service teachers from Israel and 311 pre-service teachers from Turkey participated in this study. Among the Israeli participants 157 were in the first year of study and 140 in the fourth year, all studying at a large academic college of education. Among the pre-service teachers in Turkey 151 were in the first year and 160 in the fourth year, all studying at a large university. In both countries the teaching subjects (math, history, science, literature etc.) as well as the teaching level (pre-school, elementary, high school) of the pre-service teachers varied.

The participants were asked to respond to a questionnaire with four questions, the first three open ended:

- A. If you could change 3 things in the educational system what would you change? Why?
- B. Why did you choose to study teaching?
- C. Write 5 characteristics of a good teacher. Write them from the most important – number 1 to the least important – number 5.
- D. Compare the teaching profession to other professions in Israel/Turkey on a 1-5 scale: importance of teaching profession; status of teachers; salary; weekly working hours; satisfaction.

The answers were coded according to categories and analyzed.

Results

In this paper we present pre-service teachers' responses to questions D and B.

Questions D – Comparison of the teaching profession to other professions

In this question the participants were asked to compare teaching to other professions. They had to mark their answer on a 1-5 scale, where 1 stands for "very low", 2 stands for "lower", 3 stands for "same as" 4 stands for "higher" and 5 for "much higher". For each group of pre-service teachers we calculated the mean.

Importance of the teaching profession

The mean for the Israeli pre-service teachers was 3.4 in first year and 3.7 in the fourth year. The mean of the Turkish pre-service teachers was 4.3 in the first year and 4.5 in the fourth year. The results suggest that the Turkish students believe much more that the Israeli students do that teaching is a very important profession.

In both countries the number is higher among the fourth year students suggesting that by learning and practicing teaching the pre-service teachers understood much more the importance of the profession.

Status of teachers compared to other professions

The mean for the Israeli pre-service teachers was 2.3 in first year and 2.0 in the fourth year. The mean of the Turkish pre-service teachers was 3.6 in the first year and 3.5 in the fourth year. In both countries the status of the teaching profession is low. This can be clearly seen in the answers of the Israeli students and less seen in the answers of the Turkish students. It seems that although the status of the teaching profession in Turkey is low the pre-service teachers believe that the status of teachers in their country is above average. In both countries a decrease can be seen between first and fourth year, which is much more evident among the Israeli pre-service teachers.

Salary of teachers compared to other professions

The mean for the Israeli pre-service teachers was 1.8 in first year and 1.8 in the fourth year. The mean of the Turkish pre-service teachers was 2.0 in the first year and 2.1 in the fourth year. It seems that pre-service teachers in both countries clearly mirror in their answers the low salaries of teachers with no difference between first and fourth year. Moreover, when comparing this statement to the previous one it seems that Israeli pre-service teachers connect low salary with status while the Turkish students believe that the profession of teaching in their country is above average although the salary is very low.

Weekly working hours of teachers compared to other professions

The mean for the Israeli pre-service teachers was 3.1 in first year and 3.2 in the fourth year. The mean of the Turkish pre-service teachers was 2.9 in the first year and 2.2 in the fourth year. These responses suggest that in Israel the participants ranked the weekly working hours of teachers slightly higher than in other professions, while in Turkey the mean is lower than 3, meaning that the working hours of teachers seem to them lower than for other professions and seem much lower by the fourth year pre-service teachers. In Israel in the last years there was an increase in the hours teachers have to stay at school and this might be the reason for the responses of the Israeli participants. In Turkey, it is interesting to note the decrease from 2.9 to 2.2 among the fourth year pre-service teachers. One would expect that pre-service teachers, who probably have already an idea of the time teachers have to put in their work beyond the teaching hours at school, would give a different answer. It seems that we need to further explore the reasons for this phenomenon.

Satisfaction in the teaching profession compared to other professions

The mean for the Israeli pre-service teachers was 4.0 in first year and 3.7 in the fourth year. The mean of the Turkish pre-service teachers was 3.9 in the first year and 4.1 in the fourth year. It is clear that in both countries students believe that the teaching profession is much more satisfying (for them at least) when compared to other professions. Among the Israeli students there is a decrease when comparing the first and the fourth year pre-service teachers. In Turkey there is an increase. It might be that the teaching together with the experiences they gained in school

contributed to the decrease among the Israeli and to the increase among the Turkish pre-service teachers.

Question B – Reasons for choosing to study teaching

This question was open-ended, no suggested reasons were given and the participants had to reveal their own reasons for choosing teaching as a career. In this question most of the participants gave more than one reason for choosing to become teachers.

It seems that one of the main reasons for choosing the teaching profession is altruistic – doing for others. 64% of the first year and 67% of the fourth year pre-service teachers in Israel gave this reason as one of their reasons for choosing teaching. 42% of the first year and 49% of the fourth year pre-service teachers in Turkey gave this reason. Participants said that teaching is a mission, or an ideology. They said that they have a desire to make a change, to help others, to train the next generation and to contribute to the society.

Another set of reasons focused on the pre-service teachers themselves and what they would like. 15% of the first year and 36% of the fourth year Israeli pre-service teachers said that they like children or like to teach. This kind of reason was given by 25% of the first year and 22% of the fourth year Turkish participants. 10% of the first year and 9% of the fourth year Israeli participants said that they choose teaching because they think they will be good teachers. None of the first year in Turkey used this reason, but 20% of the fourth year pre-service teachers said that they feel they can do this job. The difference among the Turkish participants might suggest that their preparation as prospective teachers made them confident in their ability to become good teachers.

Few of the students decided to choose teaching as a career since their parents are teachers or since family or teachers encouraged them to do so. Only 3% of the first year and 2% of the fourth year participants in Israel gave this reason, while the percentages among Turkish participants were a little higher: 9% among the first year and 6% among the fourth year participants.

10% of the first year and 6% of the fourth year pre-service teachers in Turkey chose teaching because of the comfortable working hours. Only 4% of the first year and 5% of the fourth year among the Israeli participants used this as a reason. These responses are in agreement with Turkish and Israeli participants' beliefs regarding the weekly working hours of the teaching profession as compared to other professions, as mentioned above.

Another reason mentioned much more by the Turkish pre-service teachers is that of teaching as a last resource career. 13% of the first year and 12% of the fourth year pre-service teachers said that they chose teaching since it was easy to get in or since they did not enter another faculty. The percentages of the Israeli pre-service teachers were 1% among both first and the fourth year, suggesting that this is not a reason at all when they choose to become teachers. It might be that these responses are somehow biased since participants might be reluctant to reveal this reason for choosing teaching as a career.

Discussion

In this study we revealed pre-service teachers' beliefs toward the status of the teaching profession and explored their reasons for choosing teaching as a career. The comparison of the responses given by pre-service teachers from Israel and from Turkey suggests, as could be expected, communalities as well as differences. One of the communalities is the high percentage of participants in both countries who chose the teaching career because of altruistic reasons and the low percentages that chose teaching as a last resort career. They know that the salary of teachers is much lower than that of other professions, but they think that teaching is an important profession which gives a lot of satisfaction.

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